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Drug traffickers take control of parts of Mexico

By David Brock
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GUADALAJARA, Mexico

In the Arizona border town of Naco, a Mexican customs officer entering the United States was discovered transporting 150 pounds of marijuana in the trunk of his car. After a skirmish with U.S. Customs officials, during which he assaulted a U.S. officer, the man fled back to Mexico on foot. U.S. Customs agents seized the car, the marijuana and the Mexican's uniform jacket. Upon learning of the incident, William von Raab, the commissioner of Customs, implored his Mexican counterpart in a letter to take some action to find the would-be smuggler, who apparently is still employed at the Mexican customs agency. The only response from Mexico so far: a request that the man's jacket be returned.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, marijuana and heroin trafficking from Mexico seemed under control; through aggressive joint action with the United States, Mexico's share of its northern neighbor's heroin market dropped by half, to 35 percent. A 1984 report by the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control called Mexico's marijuana and opium poppy eradication program "an enormous success" and "the best in the world."

But by 1986, the State Department concluded in a report that Mexico posed "the most serious problem in international narcotics control" for the United States. Diminishing control by the Mexican government over the drug trade, the report said, was "in part because of an apparent spread of drug-related corruption which has affected every facet of the enforcement program."

What happened? Officials in Mexico essentially stopped cooperating with the United States, providing a boon to Mexican drug producers and traffickers, whose activities have reached alarming new heights in the past two years. U.S. officials estimate that Mexico is now the No. 1 source of heroin and marijuana entering the country. And although most cocaine is still produced in Colombia, in the same two years Mexican dealers have become significant wholesale brokers, smuggling from Colombia at least one-third of the roughly 121 tons of cocaine believed to have been consumed in the United States last year. U.S. government estimates show that this new cocaine business brought Mexican drug traffickers about \$1.25 billion for the year.

This huge influx of additional money has emboldened the traffickers and allowed them to bribe significant numbers of officials, paralyzing the Mexican government's ability to fight its drug war. U.S. officials in Mexico City say a vast network of Mexican officials is involved in the drug business, including many who supposedly engaged in the antinarcotics efforts.

For some months, rumors have circulated in Mexico that Gen. Juan Arreola Garduqui, the defense minister who directs a significant part of Mexico's drug eradication program, is himself involved in the drug trade. U.S. intelligence sources say evidence about the general is "sketchy," but they say with assurance that his son, Juan Alejandro Garduqui, a former federal prosecutor, is working in league with major traffickers, passing along sensitive information on drug investigations and impending raids. In addition, the United States has intelligence information clearly linking top officials of the Mexican security police, Mexico's Interpol office (a section of the attorney general's office), three Mexican governors and cousins of President Miguel de la Madrid Huerta to illicit involvement with drug kingpins.

In June last year, Mr. von Raab, who has referred to the U.S.-Mexican border as a "train highway" and "marijuana mainstreet," accused a Mexican governor of growing opium poppies and marijuana on his property. Mr. von Raab mistakenly identified the accused as the governor of the state of Sonora; he intended to refer to Antonio Toledo Corro, at that time the governor of the state of Sinaloa.

U.S. law enforcement sources have confirmed that in early 1986, Miguel Felix Gallardo, a fugitive trafficker wanted in connection with the murder of a U.S. drug enforcement agent in 1985, was a guest at the ranch of Toledo Corro. The former governor is said by U.S. sources to have made a point of looking the other way during his tenure in return for payoffs.

During the investigation of the 1985 murder of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena Salazar, slain by Mexican drug traffickers, the extent of government drug-related corruption was first doc-

umented. In fact, U.S. law enforcement officials believe Mr. Camarena was killed because he was having success in gathering information on corrupt Mexican police authorities and government officials.

Mexican federal police officers under investigation in the Camarena case told investigators of their widespread practice of guarding drug crops and escorting shipments north in return for bribes and drugs. Their statements charged that Gabriel Gonzalez, the late chief of the homicide division of the federal police, ordered the agents to run errands for traffickers, guard their lavish parties and pass on tips about drug roadblocks.

Of 2,200 agents in the Federal Security Directorate, one of Mexico's national police forces, 400 were dismissed because the government suspected they had illicit "associations" with drug trafficking, but no charges have been filed against any of them. The head of the directorate, Jose Antonio Zorrilla Perez, left the country for Spain as revelations surfaced. His case has gained particular notoriety, as his signature was on a phony police credential found in the possession of Rafael Caro Quintero.

One bright spot in the investigation of the Camarena murder has been the arrest of Mr. Caro Quintero, reputedly a major Sinaloa drug smuggler. He was able to elude the authorities for months by staging a getaway from the Guadalajara airport, which was guarded by officers of the Federal Judicial Police. The officers were under orders to arrest Mr. Caro Quintero. In order to ensure his escape, he wrote a check for \$300,000 and handed it to an aide. The aide showed it to the top police commander and explained that it would be cashed the next morning and distributed among the officers if Mr. Caro Quintero could board his plane. The deal was struck, and Mr. Caro Quintero flew to Costa Rica, where he was later captured. He is now awaiting trial in Mexico City.

While the Mexican government has arrested dozens of drug traffickers in connection with the murder of Mr. Camarena, only one conviction has been secured so far, that of Armando Pavon Reyes, the Federal Judicial Police commander in Guadalajara who took Caro Quintero's bribe. He is out on \$300 bail awaiting appeal.

This failure to gain convictions is part of a larger pattern that has been a major irritant to U.S. officials who work with Mexico on the drug issue. The 1986 report from the State Department called Mexico's record of prosecuting drug traffickers a "dismal picture." Says one DEA official: "The Mexican laws are written to the advantage of the drug smugglers. They don't allow wiretaps. They have no conspiracy provisions. Basically, you have to catch someone in the act. This means there are few prosecutions."

In the wake of the Camarena investigation, Mr. Zorrilla was allowed to resign quietly. Miguel Aldana, for-



Commissioner of Customs William von Raab

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